

Town Government Study Committee

Current Town Meeting Member Study

Summary of Findings
6/15/15

Methodology

- An invitation to participate in this research study was sent to all current Wellesley Town Meeting Members via email on April 10, 2015.
 - 80% of TMM responded to the survey: 152 people completed the entire survey and 39 people completed only some of the questions
- Each person was first alerted about the survey via email by Katherine Babson, Town Government Study Committee Chair; subsequently, TMMs received an invitation email and two reminders with links to complete the online survey.
- Surveys were completed from April 10-June 11, 2015.
- Respondents were allowed to skip any questions.
 - Due to the small and varying base sizes, all charts are based to total answering
- A similar study was conducted this winter among past TMMs; the results of these two studies are compared at the end of this report.
 - Differences in the results of these two studies have been tested to identify statistically significant differences.

Key Findings: Sample Profile

- Participants in the study represented a balanced cross-section of TMM:
 - Fairly even participation across the 8 precincts
 - A relatively even mix of years of experience:
 - 23% having served for 3 years or less
 - 22% having served for 4-6 years
 - 23% having served 7-12 years
 - 18% having served for 13-21 years
 - 13% having served for 22+ years
 - A good mix of term expirations:
 - 38% of participants have terms expiring in 2016
 - 28% have terms expiring in 2017
 - 34% have terms expiring in 2018

Key Findings: Motivations to Run

- On average, participants reported 3-4 reasons for running for Town Meeting. The primary reason was to “have a voice in the decision-making process” (88%), followed by wanting to learn about “how the Town operates and spends the money” (75%), and “wanting to give back to the Town” (72%).
 - Interestingly, 36% reported they ran because of a passion and desire to vote on a single issue (36%) which was primarily related to schools and 31% reported they had been “curious about the process”.
 - One-fifth reported that Board or Department involvement was their motivation to run.
- Importantly, the primary spontaneous reasons mentioned were related to wanting to shape the town and have a voice in the decisions.
 - A significant portion of the responses were linked to an interest in supporting specific school related issues (budget and school building projects).

Key Findings: Future Intent to Run

- The majority of participants are considering running again when their term expires, with 61% stating they are “very likely to run again”
 - 29% stated they are “somewhat likely”.
- The reasons for planning to run again are linked to the initial motivations for running (valuing being part of the process and contributing).
 - Reasons for deciding not to re-run were linked to the belief that they do not have a meaningful impact.

Key Findings: Current Assessment of Being a TMM

- There is general consensus that being a TMM provides an “understanding of issues facing the Town” (88% completely agree) as well as “how the Town spends its money and operates” (83% completely agree).
 - However, the sense of fulfillment and ability to make a difference is more tenuous, with less than half “completely agreeing” with the following:
 - It is a personally fulfilling experience (48%)
 - You can make a difference in the decisions being made (35%)
 - You have a real voice in Town Government (32%)

Key Findings: Current Assessment of Town Meeting

- Similarly, Town Meeting is most strongly rated for “being informative” (75% completely agree), followed by “doing important work” (62%) .
- Assessments related to the experience and impact of Town Meeting indicate some conflicts between believing in the work of Town Meeting and the actual experience.
 - Most only “somewhat agree” that:
 - The debates on Town Meeting floor are meaningful (65%)
 - Town Meeting is enjoyable (59%)
 - People feel comfortable voicing their opinions (53%)
 - Half “completely agree” that complete information is provided to make an informed decision and 41% “somewhat agree”.
 - The majority “somewhat agree” that the votes are procedural/predictable. There was a stronger sense that votes follow the Advisory recommendation (28% “completely agree” and 57% “somewhat agree”) than that votes were just procedural and all decisions were decided in advance (15% “completely agree” and 53% “somewhat agree”).
 - Members were split between whether the meetings took too much time or not (47% “completely disagree” that the meetings took too much time).

Key Findings: Ways to Improve Town Meeting

- On a spontaneous basis, there were many comments related to having more substantive meetings, with a stronger impact on the decisions being made (and not being a “rubber stamp”); there was also a desire for the meetings to be more efficient in terms of staying on topic and avoiding redundant debates.
- More than two-thirds of the participants believed that Town Meeting would be a better experience if improvements were made to the content of presentations:
 - Reducing repetition between Advisory and Article sponsor’s presentation (68%)
 - Having Budget presenters include an update on past year’s performance with request (67%)
 - Including more detail around long-term cost impact of proposals (66%)
- About half of participants believed time-related changes would improve the experience of Town Meeting:
 - Moving more articles to the Consent Agenda (58%)
 - Starting sessions at 7:00pm instead of 7:30pm (51%)
 - Guaranteeing all sessions would end before 11:00pm (46%)
- Most believed that 240 members was the right size (68%), with 20% believing it was too large.

Key Findings: Time Allocations

- Generally, time allocations were seen as reasonable (about 8 in 10 feeling the presentations were “just right”), with the strongest satisfaction with Public Works.
 - Areas where there was the most interest in longer presentations were Schools and Special Capital Projects.
- About half of participants believed time-related changes would improve the experience of Town Meeting:
 - Moving more articles to the Consent Agenda (58%)
 - Starting sessions at 7:00pm instead of 7:30pm (51%)
 - Guaranteeing all sessions would end before 11:00pm (46%)

Key Findings: Meeting Attendance

- The majority (57%) reported that they had been unable to attend at least one session of a Town Meeting during their tenure. The primary reason was conflict with other commitments (previously scheduled commitments -- 51%, last minute change in plans – 22%, on vacation – 16%); 26% cited illness as a reason for missing a session.
- Two-thirds reported they have never left a session early. Among those that have left early, lateness of the session was the primary mention (43%).

Key Findings: Schedule Preferences

- Participants believe Town Meeting sessions should ideally be 3-3.5 hours in length (86%).
 - For most, the earliest acceptable start time is 7:00pm and the latest end time is 11:00pm; one-quarter felt ending by 10:30 was the latest acceptable time.
- There was moderate interest in going later into the evening to finish an article (36% “very acceptable” and 37% “somewhat acceptable”).
- Eliminating the break as well as shortening the length of time allocated to speakers received mixed to negative receptions (37-38% found these suggestions “not at all acceptable”, respectively)
- 8 in 10 preferred that all sessions be weeknights.
 - Conceptually, there was low interest in using Saturday sessions (68-73% found Saturdays unacceptable) to either shorten the number of days of Town Meeting or to deal with a longer issue.

Key Findings: Prep for Town Meeting

- On average, participants reported engaging in 4 of the 7 preparatory activities before the Spring ATM, with most:
 - reading the initial mailing from the Advisory Committee in advance of Town Meeting (92%)
 - Referencing the Advisory Committee Report during Town Meeting (89%)
 - Following the issues in the press/Townsman (82%)
- About half (54%) read the supplements in advance of the Spring meeting.

Key Findings: Advisory Report

- When asked about alternative distribution methods for the Advisory Report, two-thirds of participants reported that they prefer to continue receiving hard copy materials mailed to their homes; interest in downloadable reports only was limited(17%).
- The majority (84%) believe the Advisory Report contains the right amount of information.

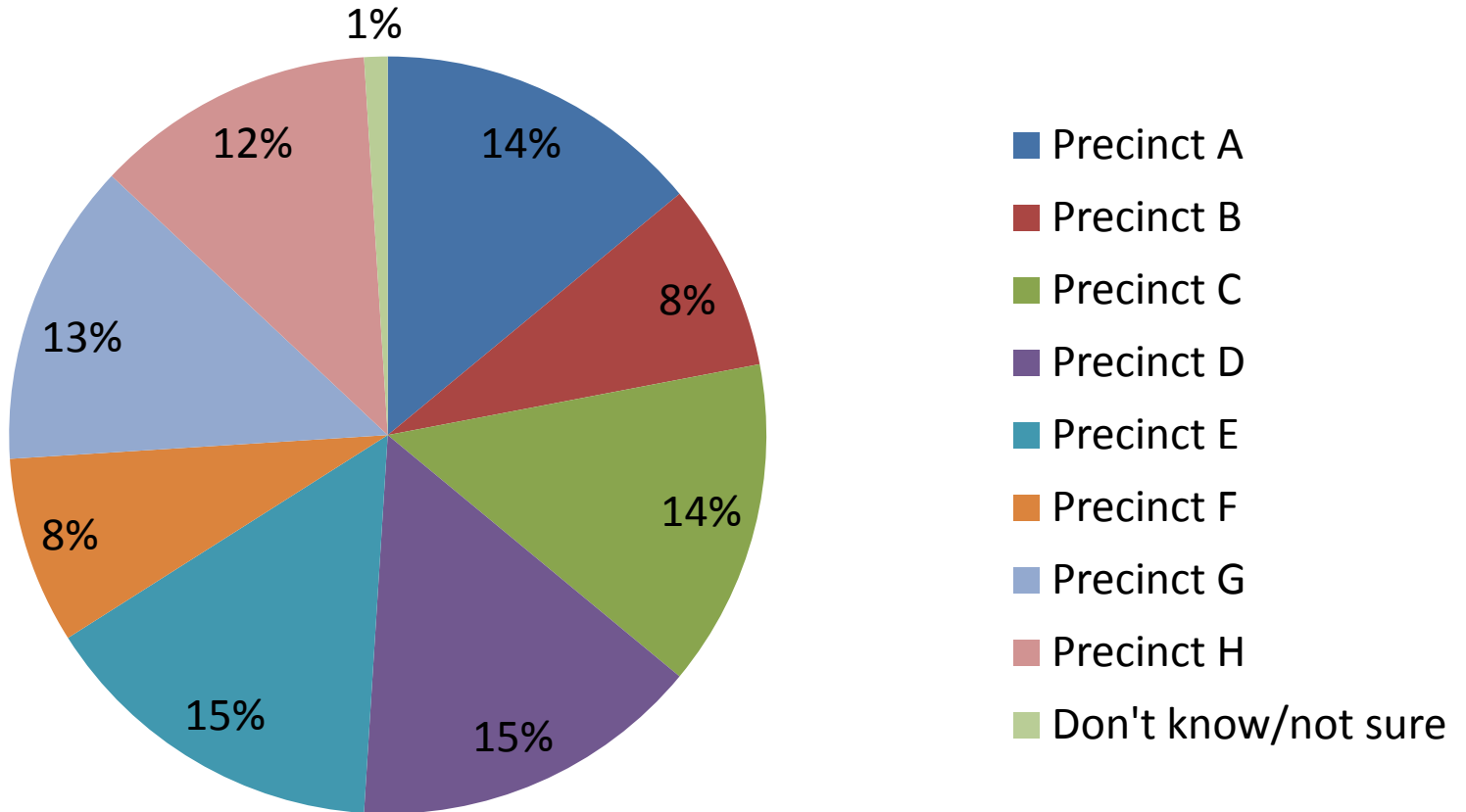
Key Findings: Advisory

- Town Meeting Members expressed appreciation for the work of Advisory
 - There was, however, significant frustration expressed about the consistent unanimous votes and a desire for deeper analysis/presentation of the impacts of each proposal..
- Participants had the most favorable review of Advisory in terms of:
 - Providing a report that meets my needs (46% “excellent” and 76% “excellent” or “very good”)
 - Providing the level of in-depth analysis you expect (44% “excellent” and 76% “excellent” or “very good”)
 - Vetting the articles in advance so you can feel confident following their recommendation (42% “excellent” and 77% “excellent” or “very good”)
 - Presenting you with the information about the issues so you can fully understand the pros and cons of an article (41% “excellent” and 74% “excellent” or “very good”)
- Satisfaction was lowest for “providing additional valuable information about the article that was not presented by the proponent presenter (22% “excellent” and 49% “excellent” or “very good”) and being impartial (33% “excellent” and 64% “excellent” or “very good”).
- In terms of future role, participants had a strong preference for Advisory to perform a full assessment of the articles (94%), work independently (70%), issue thorough write-ups of articles using the current Report format (71%), and include a write-up of how articles evolved (60%).
 - This desire for independence and thorough vetting of issues to present the impact of proposals to TM was consistently articulated in the open comments provided by members.

Key Findings: Fall Town Meeting

- In terms of Fall Town Meetings, there was most consensus around:
 - Having predictable dates (63% “very supportive”)
 - Continuing the tradition of using Fall Town Meeting only for critical needs that can not wait until Spring (59% “very supportive”)

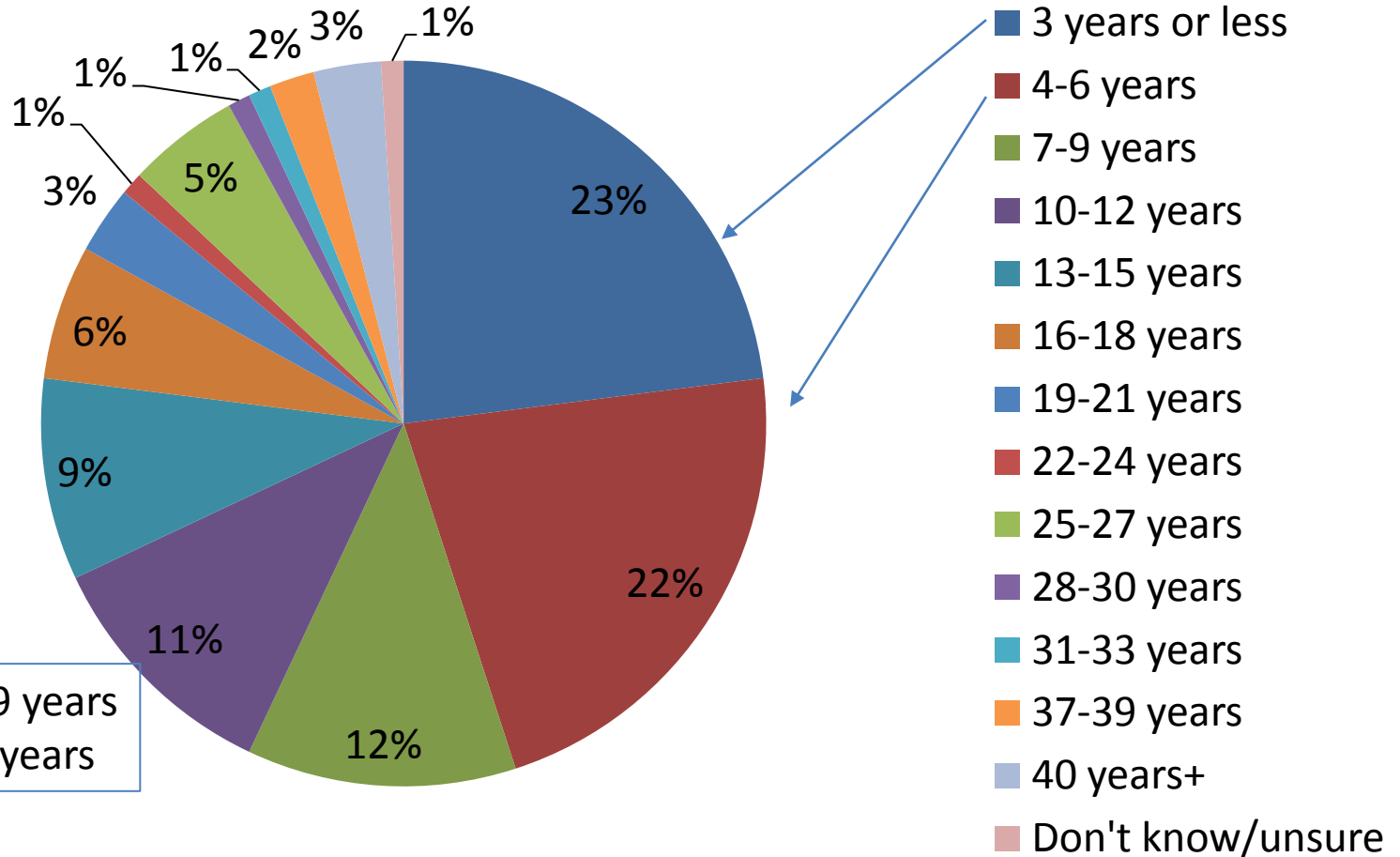
Precinct Represented



(n=170)

1. What precinct do you represent?

Years as Town Meeting Member



Most Enjoy About Being a Town Meeting Member

Contributing/having a voice/influence decisions (108)

- I enjoy being part of the town's decision making body--even when the vote does not reflect my constituents' or my views.
- Talking with Townspeople about issues that come before us. People are busy but appreciate it when TMMs can reach out. I like helping people navigate public records, meetings, meeting agendas and cable coverage.
- Learning about town government and finances; meeting other Town Meeting members and town government employees/consultants, etc.; being able to contribute in some way to the Town.
- The opportunity to learn more about town affairs, activities and priorities and participate in their development. It is my hope that my contributions can help Wellesley to continue to be a great town.
- Being a part of our Town's decision-making process - this is very empowering. The excellent presentations provided by the boards and committees. The presentations are both educational and very interesting, and they are done so well that it is a pleasure to just sit back and enjoy!
- Being able to add a voice and cast a vote for important issues and projects

- Through the TM process, participating in thoughtful dialogue and due consideration on what is in Wellesley's best interest, both short- and long-term; making informed decisions; advocacy for important issues that affect everyone.
- Knowing details about what is happening/planned for the town. Having impact on those plans.
- The ability to influence town matters that are important to me. Seeing first hand the thoughtfulness and care that has gone into budgets, bylaws, etc. Feeling part of the community. Seeing and meeting friends who also care deeply about our town.

Knowing what is going on in the town (87)

- The opportunity to learn about the activities, direction and priorities of our town.
- Learning about the major issues confronting the town like where to put the senior center, and new developments like the fact that the Library has won a state award.
- Hearing all that is going on related to the schools, the police, the DPW, MLP, library, and so on. Wellesley is an amazingly fortunate and well run town and I am pressed by all the volunteers who give their time and expertise.
- I enjoy learning in detail about town issues and finances, particularly at TM when information is presented that is not previously published.
- Understanding local / civic issues in an in-depth and specific way. Participation the most basic / grass roots democratic process, and unique New England institution - Town Meeting
- Getting to know the key decision makers in town and hearing all of the important issues discussed. Being aware of how we spend our tax dollars.
- I enjoy understanding and appreciating how the town is run. I like interacting and working with fellow Wellesley residents who are similarly minded and want the best for our town.

Be social/with neighbors at Town Meeting (16)

- Meeting the other members of the town committee who are willing to explain the processes and history behind some of the action items.
- I most enjoy the social aspects of participating in Town government, such as knowing my neighbors better, greeting people whom I know when I am out and about town, and having a sense of belonging to a community.

Most Frustrating About Being a Town Meeting Member

Issues were decided prior to the meeting (85)

- All the decisions are made prior to Town Meeting, outcome is predictable. Sometime fallacy arguments occur. Such as, When debate occurs, it is shut down by saying that committees have studied the item. Or, sometimes people say that just the length of years that a topic has been studied is a reason to accept it.
- Decisions are already made, we can't fine-tune what is included or not in a proposal. Article 8 is just a rubber stamp.
- Lately, it has felt that outcomes are not in question, and TM is a rubber stamp.
- By the time we are ready for Town Meeting, it is too late to meaningfully inquire about budget items. Also frustrating is just listening to a sales pitch instead of an analysis.
- Exceeding long presentations that reiterate what is in the Advisory book. The sense the relatively few decisions are truly left to the Town Meeting, which essentially confirms the work of the Boards.
- At the end of the day, my vote doesn't really matter. The operating budget decisions have been made and you can't impact it at all. The management of the Town has set it up to make sure the proposed budget passes..
- The feeling that most issues are a fait accompli by the time they get to the floor of Town Meeting. There is little room for true debate, discussion and making changes, especially on budget issues.

Meetings go too long/too late/too long-winded (37)

- A great deal of the time at Town Meeting feels redundant and it can be hard at that late date to have input in the process.
- Length of weeknight meetings. We should be able to pre-read materials and have presenters assume some degree of familiarity with topics to be discussed w/o recapping the entirety of the briefing documents.
- Listening to repeated opinions on a topic. "Everything that needs to be said, has been said... just not everyone has said it." Long explanations by the Advisory Committee. It could be streamlined. Repetitive rhetoric

Too much time spent on the process/protocol (8)

- The formality of the meetings. I often want to say something, but am frustrated by the necessity to formally announce my intentions. I wish there were a format for informal discussion.
- Bureaucratic minutia. Some items seem so straight-forward but still demand significant time.
- Time required for minor motions – although the consent motion has improved the time requirements.

Members are unprepared (12)

- that so many TMMs don't seem to read the Advisory Report or come to TM prepared, and that many do not seem to participate throughout the year
- That not all TMM are prepared for TM (e.g. have fully read the Advisory Report), which slows down proceedings

Not enough information provided in the meetings (35)

- Not always having the required information to make a well informed decision. For example the costs associated with building projects. The costs should be available to TM prior to the night the vote is to be taken.
- The School Security costs were given to TM the night of the vote as a part of a presentation rather documents that showed the costs and with a detailed explanation.
- Sometimes feeling there is a lack of transparency from the BOS on topics. It is frustrating if as a TMM I feel all of the information is not forthcoming.
- Lack of diversity in Advisory's votes and the assumed foregone conclusions.
- The basis of decisions or proposals are not presented...f Alternatives considered or other options are never presented.

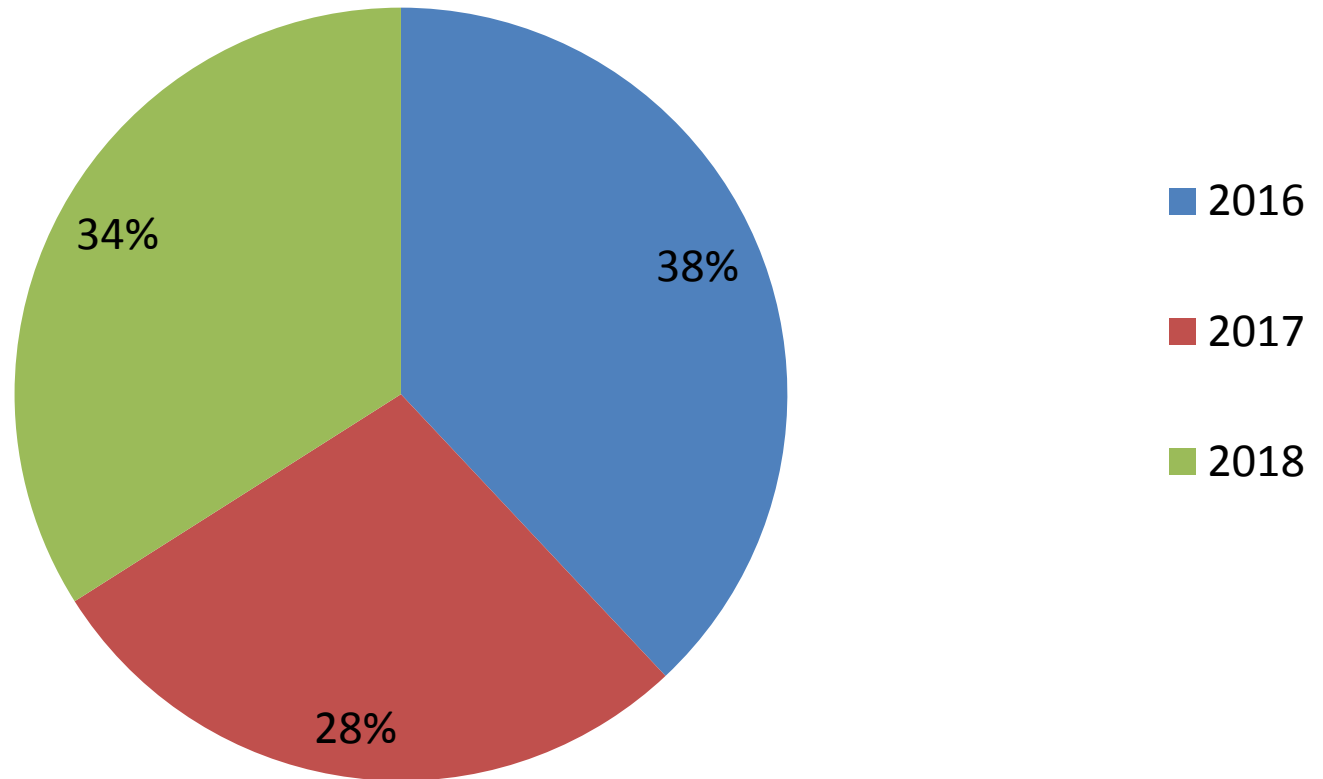
5. What do you find most frustrating about being a Town Meeting Member?

Most Frustrating About Being a Town Meeting Member

Other comments

- Town Meeting members are afraid or intimidated about voting no in a standing vote. The voice votes never seem to be even close in result to the standing votes.
- Advisory Committee always seems to vote 100% for all projects and the TMM goes along with the Advisory recommendations automatically. A possible reason that TMM goes along with advisory's recommendationeach time the closing statement is 100% yes, 0% no. Article 17 is a perfect example....11 yes and 0 no recommendation....TM vote was yes. However, the chair of Advisory voted no as a TMM, along with the majority of Selectmen voting in the negative....These are the people who have the most information on the positive and negative impacts on the project but TM never heard their valuable input.
- I find the present format diminishes debate and questions. The omnibus article 8 rolls everything up in a tight package so questions are a waste of time and are practically nonexistent. I feel everything is packaged up and decided before TM and the vote becomes merely a formality. I find Advisory's role to be the most frustrating.
- I don't know if they know what their role is and if it is to be an advocate for each board then for me they are a waste of time.
- I think that we spend way too much time on unimportant or lesser important issues/articles and not enough time on larger dollar and particularly budgetary items.
- I believe TM is heavily weighted with pro-spenders and special interest proponents – which may not be totally in sync with the general population of the town.
- Boards that are not forthcoming with information, especially Schools and Selectmen. Inability to call for the vote when it is clear that the vast majority of TMMs have made up their minds. Pressure from the Moderator to shorten the meeting, leading to eliminations of all information on sewer and water, and pressure on presenters to shorten presentations which short-change the educational function/opportunities for TMMs.

When Term Ends



(n=169)

3. When does your term end?

Primary Reason First Decided To Run for Town Meeting

School Issues (42)

- I first learned about Town Meeting and its importance during the planning phase of building the new high school.
- I wanted to support the WHS project and the school in general (overrides). I was one of the parents who was very disappointed when the Spanish program was cut and it made a school advocate out of me!
- I decided to run because I was interested in the building of the new High School-even though I did not have any more children who would attend and because I was/am concerned of having Wellesley McMansionized thus eliminating opportunities for first time buyers. I wanted to have a voice on the bill which would make the house size compatible with lot size.
- Middle and high school projects.
- Potential for 6 classroom addition at the Bates School.
- To support the school budget.
- I was involved in the (elementary school) PTO and saw all of the school budget discussions and wanted to have a vote on those.
- I didn't want the school budget to be slashed.
- Sprague renovations Support plans to renovate the elementary schools

Other issues/reasons (25)

- An issue effecting my neighborhood many years ago drew me into how the Town Government works.
- I felt like Senior citizens are marginalized.
- To help protect the North 40
- To be a passionate voice for the natural environment, historical/cultural preservation.
- I wanted to be involved in the purchase and development of the St James project

Wants to shape the town (55)

- I wanted to play a part in town government.
- I wanted to be able to influence how the town allocates its scarce financial resources.
- I wanted to be part of the decision making body for our town. I also sit on a town board and am interested in seeing our mission fulfilled.
- Frustration among long-term residents about the way Wellesley is governed - large amounts of spending, questionable planning, and higher taxes as a result.

Contributing/having a voice in decisions (44)

- I have in depth knowledge of various items that come before our Town's government and wanted to use that knowledge in a beneficial way.
- Neighbor (fellow TMM) encouraged me to run for an open seat. I intend to be civically engaged wherever I live so I decided to run in open election and did pretty good for a newcomer.
- To "give back" to the town and become better acquainted with how the town is run.

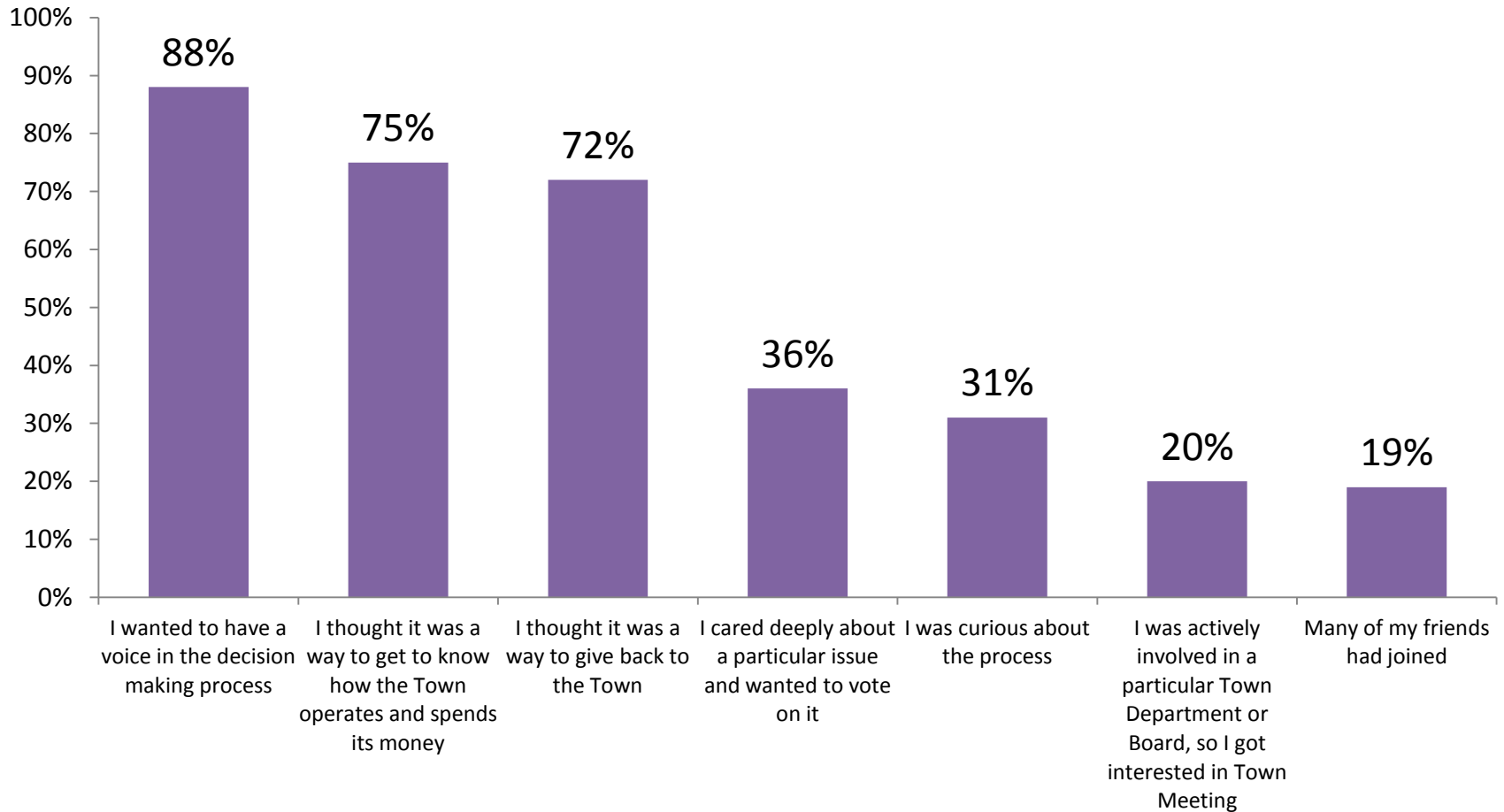
Neighbor encouraged them run (4)

- A neighbor asked me to run for an uncontested seat.

knowing what is going on in the town (26)

- I want to know what is going on in town affairs and hope to have an influence. I think the expectations for volunteers in this town are inappropriately heavy.
- I wanted to learn more about how our town government operated and makes its financial and strategic decisions

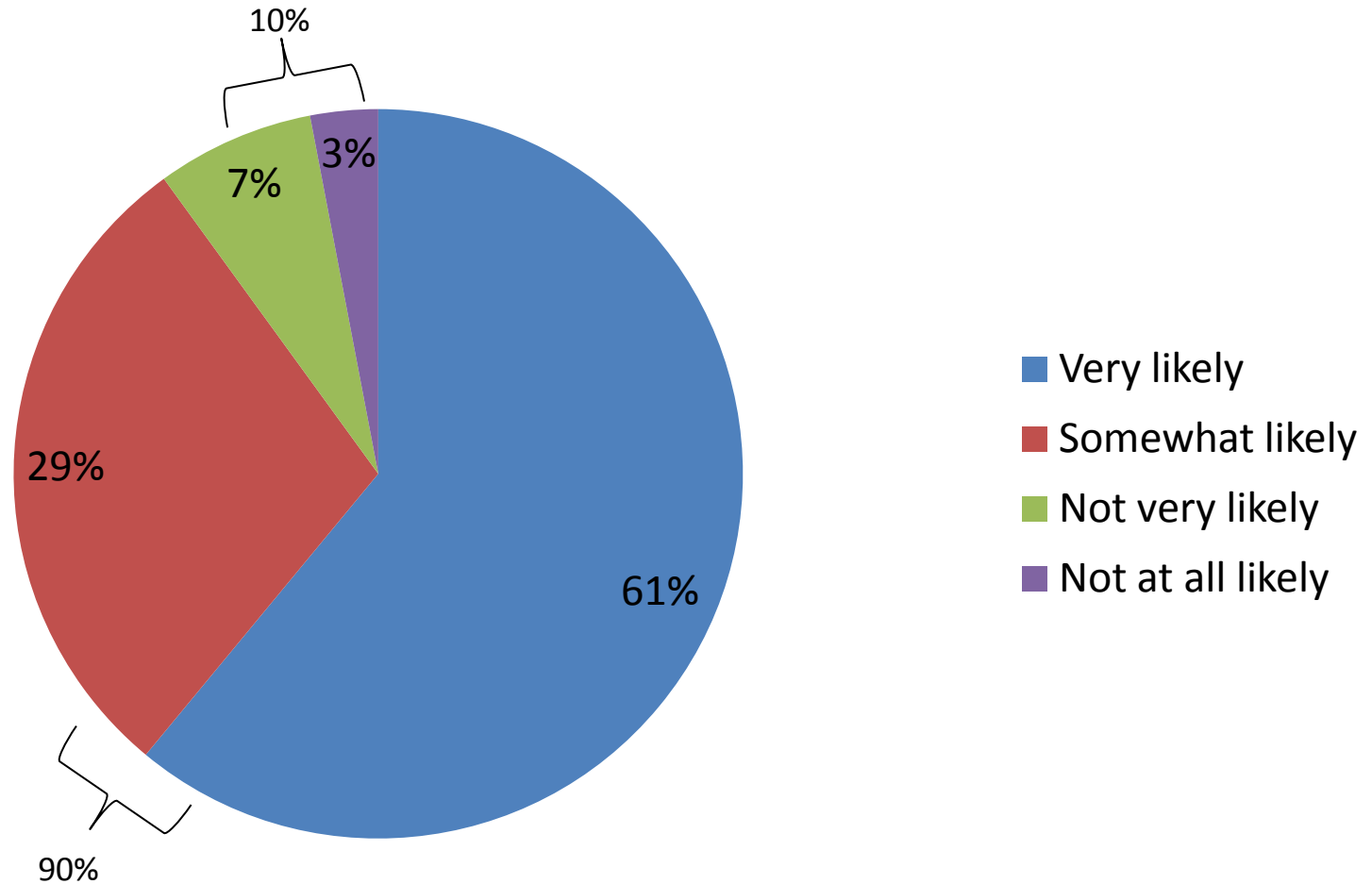
Motivations for Running



(n=159)

7. You may have mentioned one of these already, but please indicate which of these reasons below were important motivations for choosing to run for Town Meeting.

Likelihood to Run Again When Term is Up



Reasons Likely/Not Likely to Run Again

Likely (137)

- Because I have genuinely enjoyed being part of the TM process and hope my engagement will continue and evolve over time.
- Because I love this town and want it to continue to be the best community it can be. I have the time and energy to invest in learning about the issues at hand and enjoy the process.
- I believe it is important to be involved in the town as I am a resident (obviously) and a member of the small business community.
- I consider the opportunity to take an active role in self-governance to be a precious right won for us by the sacrifices of many that came before us. Additionally, it is a small way that I can contribute to the Town that has given my family and me so much. Finally, I find it terrifically interesting.
- I enjoy the process and the community. If I choose not to run, it will be because of the concern that TM has become a rubber stamp on policies that have already been thoroughly advocated for and vetted. I'll look to get involved earlier in the process on issues that matter to me.

Not Likely (15)

- I feel as if my time is not as well spent as it used to be. Could be TM fatigue, but not sure I'm making any helpful impact
- I feel that town meeting is pretty ineffective. My interest would increase if I thought my involvement had a meaningful effect.
- As I said earlier, Town Meeting is a rubber stamp. All the decisions appear to be made by the Advisory Council, so it's a waste of time to be a TMM unless one is willing to go to many additional meetings before TM.
- At my age there are fewer long range considerations that I can fairly impose on others.

Agreement with Statements About Being Town Meeting Member

	Completely Agree	Somewhat Agree	Do Not Agree At All
	%	%	%
It gives you a good understanding of the specific issues faced by the Town	88	12	-
It gives you a good understanding of how the Town operates and spends its money	83	16	1
It gives you a good understanding of the Town's outlook for the future	77	21	2
It is something you are glad you do	75	23	2
It is important to do if you care about the town as a whole	72	23	5
The time commitment involved in being a Town Meeting member is reasonable	69	27	4
It is part of what makes Wellesley special	55	35	10
It is part of one's civic responsibility	53	37	10
It is a personally fulfilling experience	48	47	5
It is a great way to get to know other people in Town	46	48	6
You can make a difference in the decisions being made	35	53	12
It is important to do even if you only care about 1-2 particular issues	33	36	31
You have a real voice in Town Government	32	55	13
You can actively participate without a lot of preparation prior to the meeting	19	44	37

(Base varies)

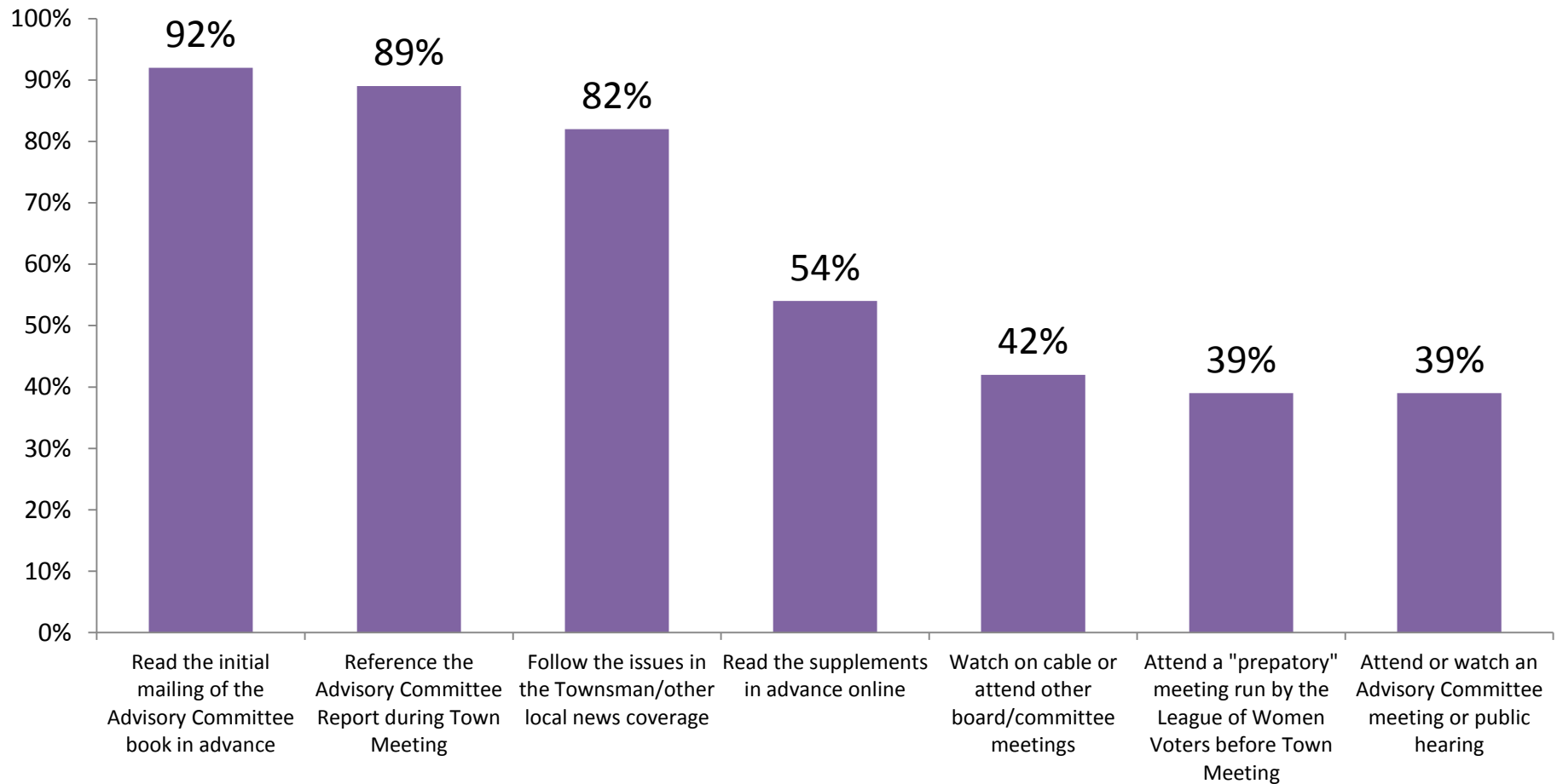
10. How much do you agree with each of these statements about being a Town Meeting Member?

Agreement with Statements About Town Meeting

	Completely Agree	Somewhat Agree	Do Not Agree At All
	%	%	%
Town Meeting is informative	75	25	-
Town Meeting does important work	62	34	4
Complete information is provided at the Meeting to make an informed decision	50	41	9
Town Meeting is enjoyable	37	59	4
People feel comfortable voicing opinions at Town Meeting	33	53	14
Votes are predictable and always match the Advisory Committee's recommendation	28	57	15
The debates on the floor of Town Meeting are meaningful	27	65	8
The outcome of a vote at Town Meeting is not clear until the articles are debated on the floor of Town Meeting	18	55	27
The discussion is always monopolized by a few people	16	56	28
The meetings take too much time	15	38	47
Town Meeting is just procedural, all the decisions are really made in advance	15	53	32

(Base varies)

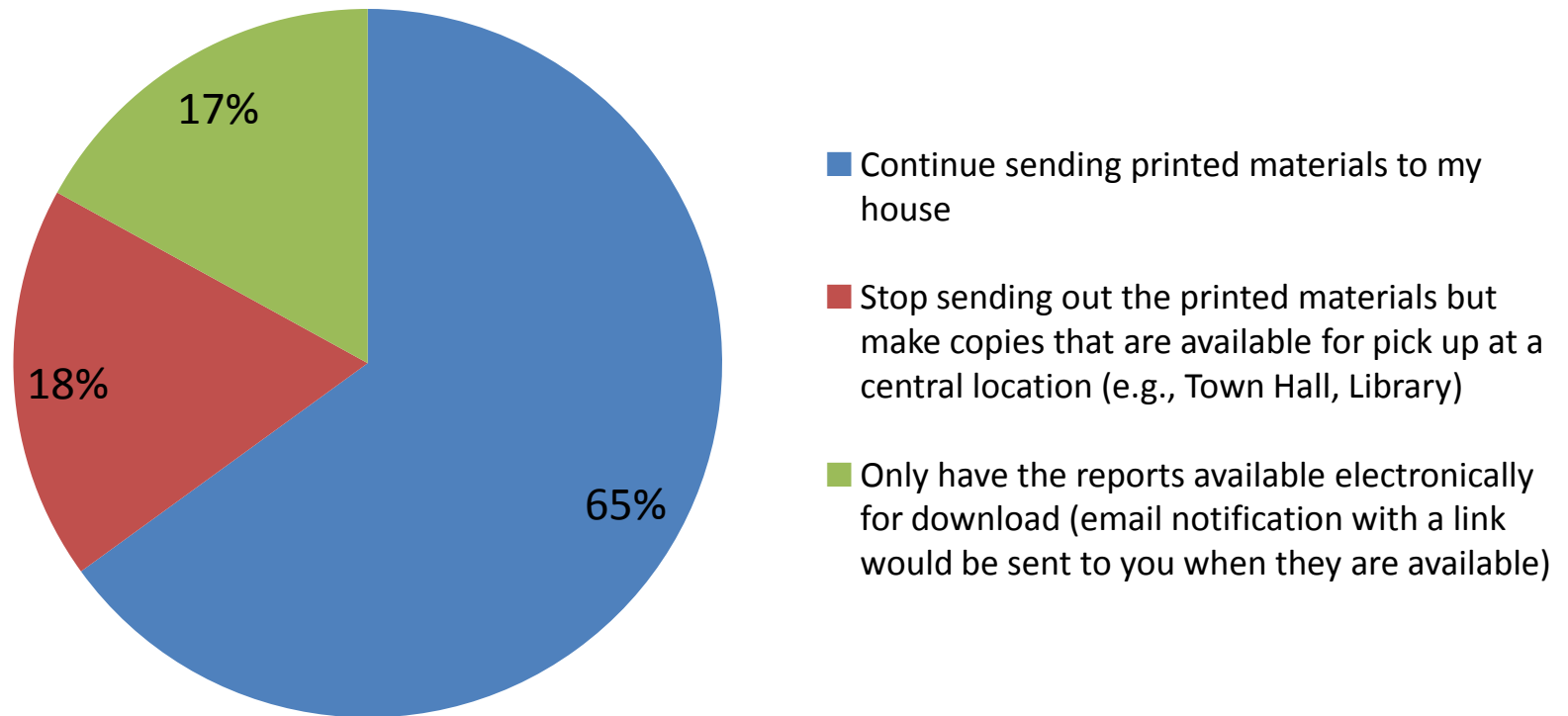
How Prepared For Spring's Town Meeting



(n=160)

12. Which of the following did you do to prepare for this Spring's Town Meeting?

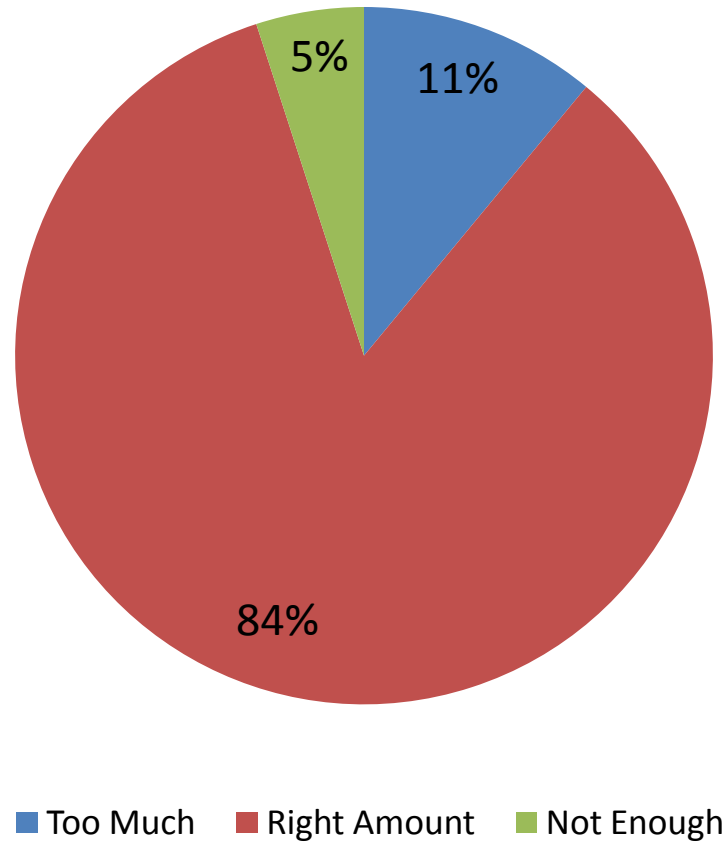
How Would Personally Prefer to Receive Advisory Reports Prior to Town Meeting



(n=157)

13. Assuming Advisory Reports are available online, for download, on the Town website, how would you personally prefer to receive the Advisory Reports prior to Town Meeting? (SELECT ONE)

Feelings about Amount of Information Contained in Advisory Report



(n=159)

14. For your needs, did the Advisory Report contain: (SELECT ONE)?

Suggestions for Improving Advisory Report

Provide more time to review Advisory reports (20)

- Article 17 decision and explanation was delivered late with not enough time to review in order to make a better decision by TMM. More positive and negative information on articles needs to be presented and 100% yes on final statements is misleading and a better method needs to be adopted. Show TMM what was really in their thoughts.
- Although in total the information provided is great to have, one week to read all the write-ups and the reports is not enough time to fully absorb what one needs to. I would rather have the reports and background, as well as possibly an executive summary, provided earlier with updates and Advisory votes added as they happen.

Provide more detailed reports to TMM (11)

- Would like to read minority opinion details. Prefer having the votes on the Articles prior to the Report publication. Seems we are seeing more delayed votes right up to and during Town Meeting.
- Two items: 1) Provide much more detail information on head-count (FTEs) year to year, over many years, and compared to other towns. 2) Have a 2/4 page spread of key financial and operating figures (free cash balance, tax rates, FTE's, bonded indebtedness, overrides/debt exclusions, population, departmental budgets (totals) and rate of increase, Budget Guideline %'s, State Aid, Pension Funding / OPEB liability, contract renewal dates, etc, etc, over a 10 year time period. - Very much like the 10 summary data in the back of a corporation Annual Report.

Summarize reports given to TMM (16)

- Advisory should be MUCH more succinct. Do not repeat what has already been presented, simply indicate the factors that were considered, identify the internal debate that occurred and why you ended up where you did. In most cases (especially 14 - 0 votes), this should take 2 minutes or less. No need for Advisory to speak further unless in answer to questions/comments from TMM's.
- Although the Report is superb and covers almost any issue one can think of, it is too long. It is too much of a challenge to read the whole Report. I worry that its length discourages people from reading it and therefore limits the preparation they are willing to make prior to TM

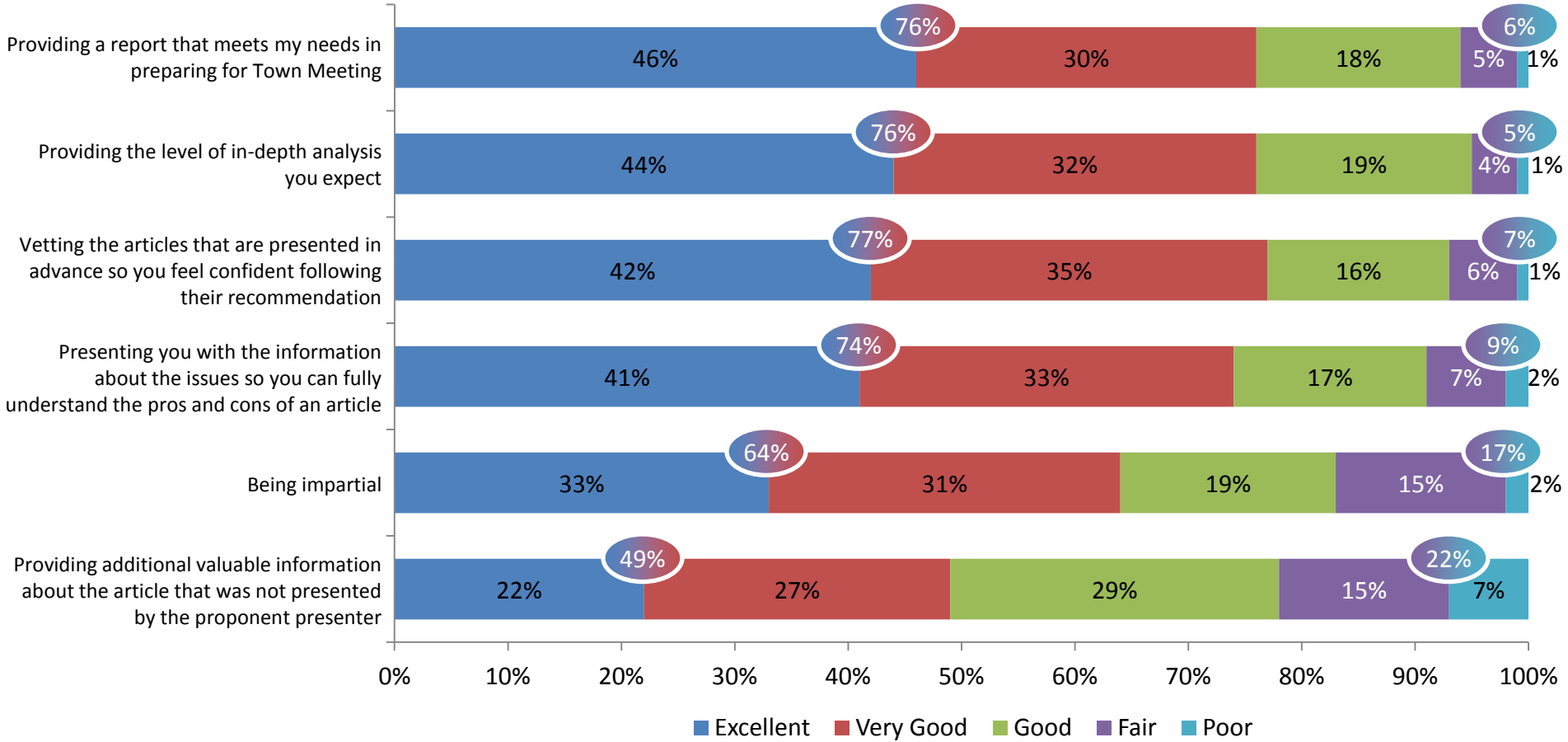
None/good as is (87)

- The Advisory Report meets my needs. It is complete and informative.
- Not sure. Advisory Committee is awesome in the quality of the reports they provide us.
- None. But it is interesting that in certain articles, there is discussion about various differing points of view held by certain Advisory members and concerns that Advisory has - yet 99% of the time, the vote is unanimous despite the concerns raised.

Provide electronic files to TMM (5)

- I have been one of the principal architects of the Advisory Report for the past three years so I think I am biased ;-) I would like to see active links within the pdf downloads so people could click on and download reports and other materials that were referenced (especially if the Report is electronic only; as it is currently mailed out, providing active links seemed to be more trouble than it was worth).

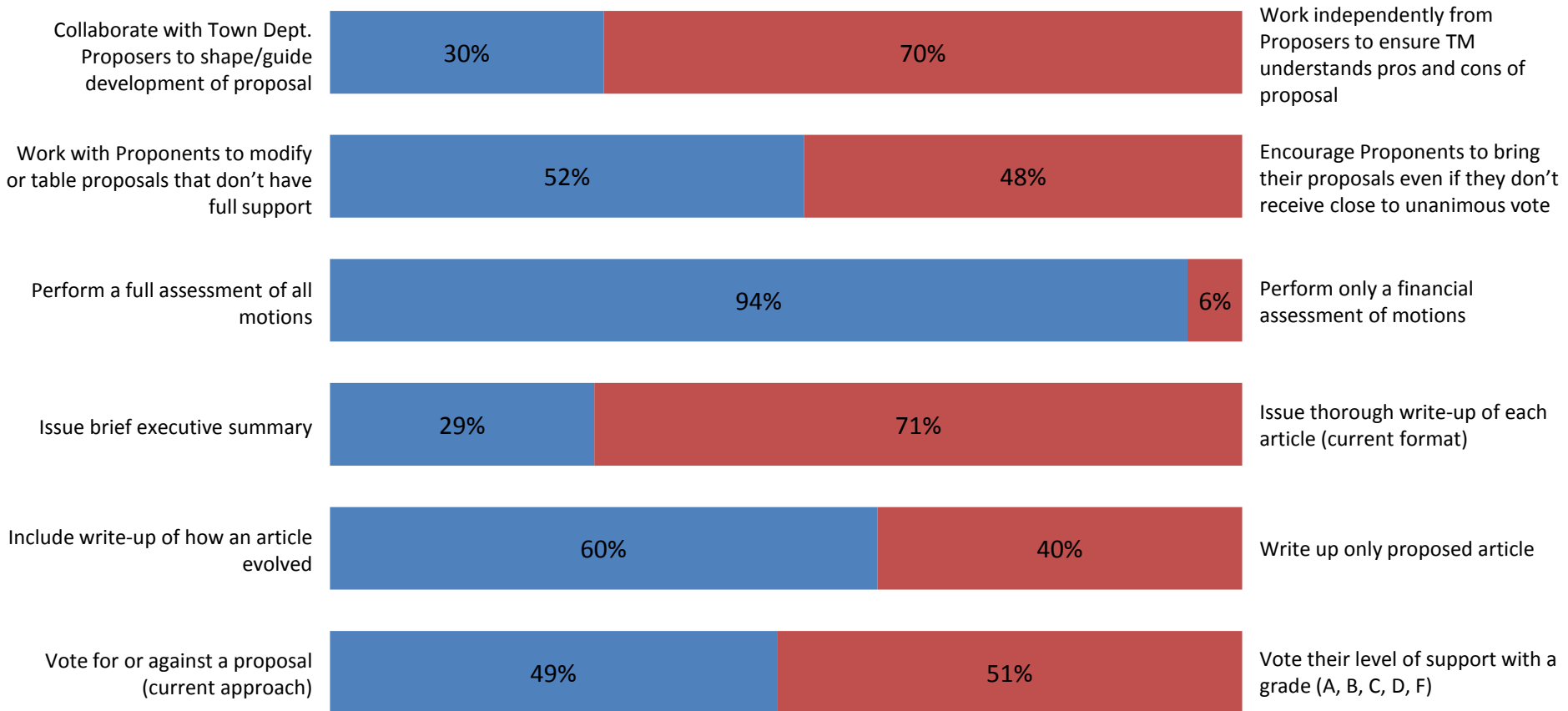
Rating of Advisory



(Base varies)

19. How would you rate Advisory in terms of:

Role Would Most Like Advisory to Play in Future



(Base Varies)
 20. Below are several sets of choices about roles and responsibilities. Please pick the choice that most closely captures the role you would most like Advisory to play in the future. (CHOOSE ONE IN EACH GROUPING)

What Sees As Primary Role of Advisory

Reviewing town issues (45)

- Review all information submitted to it in advance and summarize for Town Meeting the information important for Town Meeting members to reach their own conclusion about the issues as well as communicate to Town Meeting how the several Advisory Committee members would vote on a particular issue..
- To carefully review articles and ask important questions and scrutinize requests.
- To evaluate in more depth the various motions, articles and issues that come before the town meeting and then report to the town meeting members.
- to review proposals presented to the town to first see if they make sense and then to suggest refinements that might make the proposal more realistic, with a greater chance of approval.

Determine what issues (vetting) to bring to TMM (42)

- To pre-screen the issue at hand and make recommendations.
- To vet all issues in the motions. ask tough questions, leave no stone unturned. hold boards accountable
- Vetting the Articles for economic, social and environmental value. I believe they do this but it may not be that compartmentalized in the reports. Perhaps it should be.
- Proper vetting of the warrants. I believe in other towns our Advisory Committee is the Finance Committee, so obviously Advisory plays the large role of fiscal responsibility.

Provide/present concise reports to TMM (10)

- Doing the detailed analysis of each article and presenting a bottom-line version of the issue and telling us how they voted. Which is what they have been doing.
- Advisory provides a more in depth analysis of the proposed articles and has more opportunity to ask questions in a smaller setting.

Budget (31)

- To assist Town Meeting with a thorough analysis of budgets and actual warrant articles. All pros and cons should be noted so that TM Members can make informative votes and not rubber-stamp the vote of Advisory.
- As I said earlier, I expect them to go deeper into the budgets. They have a responsibility to be critical thinkers and inform TM of their findings---positive and negative. I do not see them as part of the team with the boards and committees. There used to be a "fear factor" of having Advisory scrutinize a board budget. I think that is gone and it is a loss.
- Keeping boards accountable for their budgets

Provide recommendations (34)

- To support/guide the thinking of the TM members as part of the discussion and vote.
- Weighing the many responsibilities & goals of the town & providing recommendations on where money should go - with much more background knowledge than a town meeting member can have. Also I see them as pushing & questioning departments to make sure they are spending efficiently.

Suggestions for How Advisory Committee Can Better Serve Needs

Tougher/more challenging on presenters/the board (16)

- Be just a little tougher. Pay more attention to departments adding personnel and determine the actual need.
- be more willing to challenge town boards
- To reflect a cross section of town views and not be afraid to challenge presenters

More detailed vetting process regarding issues presented to TMM (12)

- To review each article on the warrant with an eye toward why the issue is important, what it means to the town if it passes including the positive and negative aspects. To review the article with the sponsors and discuss pros/cons to be sure work is well thought out and as complete as possible. If the article is not ready, to suggest refining or withdrawing but NOT to micromanage the work of the sponsoring board etc. in an effort to gain success. The sponsoring group should be ready when they come to Advisory and if there are shortcomings, be prepared to go back and refine.

Advisory already does an effective job (7)

- Advisory does the best that it can with the current, arguable very inefficient, decentralized way that the town government is organized.
- I think Advisory could practically replace Town Meeting.

Provide more detailed reports (3)

- Provide an executive summary of their findings, with 3 key considerations and their recommendation for each issue. AC report should be the back-up to the executive summary.

More information as to how they arrived at a unanimous vote (15)

- Don't restate or re-cap the motion or what has been said by the proposer of the motion (unless there is a difference of view of the facts) go right to the heart of the Advisory discussion and decision. More split Advisory votes - with explanations - is a good thing - not something to necessarily be avoided.
- Roy Switzler's question in his letter to the editor in the 4/17/15 Townsman was an important one--why the chairman of Advisory and a number of Selectmen voted no on the \$408K School Security planning article. I generally disagree strongly with Roy, but it is a question that is relevant to this survey item. How could the Chairman vote no after giving a report of 12 to 0 in favor of the article?

Budget expertise (11)

- 1) Shorten the book 2) Approach the budget in a different way. It still seems that AC gets into every detail imaginable. Perhaps if the proponents had more responsibility for explaining the budgets in writing at the time of budget submission, it would help. 3) something has to be done to educate the first year AC members because they play an important role right away. an orientation needs to be more in depth; at least it seemed that this year the first years were not as well versed as in previous years.
- Help TMM to understand what financial decisions are a "must" and their long term consequences. We have made a start on long term planning!
- I think Advisory should be more of a "gatekeeper" in terms of keeping the total amount of spending in line. Advisory gives approval to more proposals/articles than we can adequately fund at one time.

Stated previously in Q.17 (10)

- See previous answer. But, as an example, the TWFP and the Five Year Capital Plan don't really seriously grapple with many of our most important issues. Advisory should be pointing that out and pressing Boards to confront the issues. It does not have the time or energy to do so given the short term focus and feeling that it needs to vet every detail of every article

Suggestions for Improving Advisory Committee Presentation at TMM

Too much time spent on protocol (17)

- Advisory Chair need not say his name, precinct, and "Madam Moderator" for every single motion response. He need not repeat what the motion presenter said.
- Although this year was a significant improvement over prior years in that the Chair spent almost all the time with thoughtful comments, it is still unnecessary to repeat what the motion is. It is particularly noticeable in the articles that are non-controversial and have been "presented" by the proponent.

Faster/speed up the process (19)

- Cut down on some of the repetition of what is already in the book. This was done to a good extent this year, but could be better.
- No need to repeat the motion under consideration. Get right to Advisory's recommendation and reasoning, pro & con
- Streamline. Provide explanation on line, for people to review. Give a very brief outline and final decision. People can review the longer explanation on line if they want.

Present concerns/issues related to topics rather than unanimous voting outcome only (5)

- Advisory does not have to restate everything that has just been stated by the presenter of the article. Advisory could simply give their perspective. It would also be helpful if Advisory votes weren't orchestrated to reach a unanimous decision. If everyone on Advisory truly agrees, than Advisory is not a good representation of the views across town.
- Opinions expressed in Advisory commentary should be reflective of the Advisory vote announced. So often positive Advisory unanimous votes are presented with many non-supportive remarks. It's challenging to determine true sense of Advisory's opinion when the vote doesn't seem to reflect the opinion of the Committee.

More detail related to the issues (12)

- As in the last question, more information about the comments/debate during Advisory meetings.
- Don't merely reiterate what is written. Tell more about issues raised and debated during the process and deliberations

None/good as is (73)

- The presentation varies with the presenter. The actual material is consistently well thought out and complete.
- The current practice of trying to describe the Advisory discussion in greater detail to give TMMs a sense of the pros and cons of an article is good, and a vast improvement over previous Advisory Chair recitations of the Advisory considerations section of the book and/or repetition of the presenter's material. I would like to see this practice continue going forward.
- None - Enjoyed Advisory this year and thought they did a good job while sharing some perspective along the way which I would encourage in future session as it illustrates the behind the scenes discussions that go on.

Changes to Make Town Meeting More Effective

Faster meetings (36)

- Assume that TMM have read the information sent to them. Do not repeat information twice. Do NOT let people talk for more than 1 minute and if they are off topic, stop them. Take a straw vote at the beginning because if it is overwhelmingly in favor then there is no point in having 6 people talk for 1 hour about whatever we are voting on. If the goal is to give TMM a voice in our government, then the whole process needs to change. Every TMM needs to sit on a committee and go to more meetings to really be involved in the process or all it is a rubber stamp.
- Have mentioned some of these earlier. Continue pressure on Advisory and the presenters to keep material succinct and effective. Limit long speeches. I have never heard a TMM speak 5 minutes or longer that couldn't have been more effective in 3-4 minutes. Keep Board and staff folks, who are answering questions, up at the mike. It is annoying to wait for them to get up each time or to figure out who will give the answer. This should be done ahead of time.
- Limit speakers extra time. It rarely merits the added time. Stop comparing to nearby towns and compare to exclusive towns around the country. This myopic benchmarking promulgates narrow thinking
- Add more items to the Consent article.

More substantive meetings (37)

- Financial Presentation on budget is becoming too broad. Need more detail and more discussion.
- Move away from trying to do work in shortest amount of time and give more attention to information provided AC! short presentations can be effective if they include quick review of department work over past year, forward plans and resources required to bring those plans to fruition. Simply forcing short presentations for sake of time is not helpful to TMM to understand aspects and the needs of departments. Stop allowing speakers extra time to simply lobby for a proposal, lecturing TMM, presenting no significant information.

Members being more prepared (6)

- 1) Encourage TMMs to prepare before start of TM by attending a LWV session 2) Publish a list of attendance right after the conclusion of TM so that those who have poor attendance records might decide to resign or not run again
- -We need more competition for TM seats. It is too easy to get elected which leads to people voting their personal interest and/or not being fully prepared or informed on the issues. -We should be able to vote on budget items individually, not all at once

Lower the number of Town Meeting members (6)

- Fewer members so that precincts can be more selective in who they elect (and provide competition for seats); provide us with real ability to impact decision making
- If there continues to be a paucity of candidates for TM resulting in no (or very few) contested elections, would recommend reduction in size. Only about 25% of members actually engaged in commenting and questioning. Need more engagement by TMMs.

Members stick with their original vote (5)

- Voting done electronically might encourage people to vote without the influence of the group. I do not know if this is a good idea or not....I am sure it will be discussed by the town government study group.
- Electronic voting. More debate. Stop the Advisory committee 13 - 0 11-0 we want to understand the reasons for yes and no to many TMMs influenced by advisory reports 13-0 11-0 votes.
- Secret balloting would get more accurate votes.

Other Comments

Faster meetings (8)

- No repetitive comments (moderator must be firm), 5 minutes ONLY, no long histories
- The length of time that TM takes is not due to the presentations by proposers. The time the Town Boards take is appropriate to educate and inform TM. What takes so long is repetitive debate and speakers in opposition or support taking too long, and going off topic. Moderator should guide the discussion by suggesting that speakers keep to the topic and try to only speak if they have something new to say. After debate has gone on for awhile moderator should be more alert to restlessness of TMMs. Also after debate has lasted awhile, the moderator should simply ask, "Are you ready to vote?"; the nature of the reply would let everyone know that debate should be ended. By that time, votes are not changed by more debate anyway.

Lower the number of Town Meeting members (4)

- Fewer TMM seats in each precinct might create greater competition in annual races. Reduce from 30/district to 24.

None (28)

- Not beyond what I've already communicated in this survey
- No, but thank you for your hard work. Can't wait to hear the results.

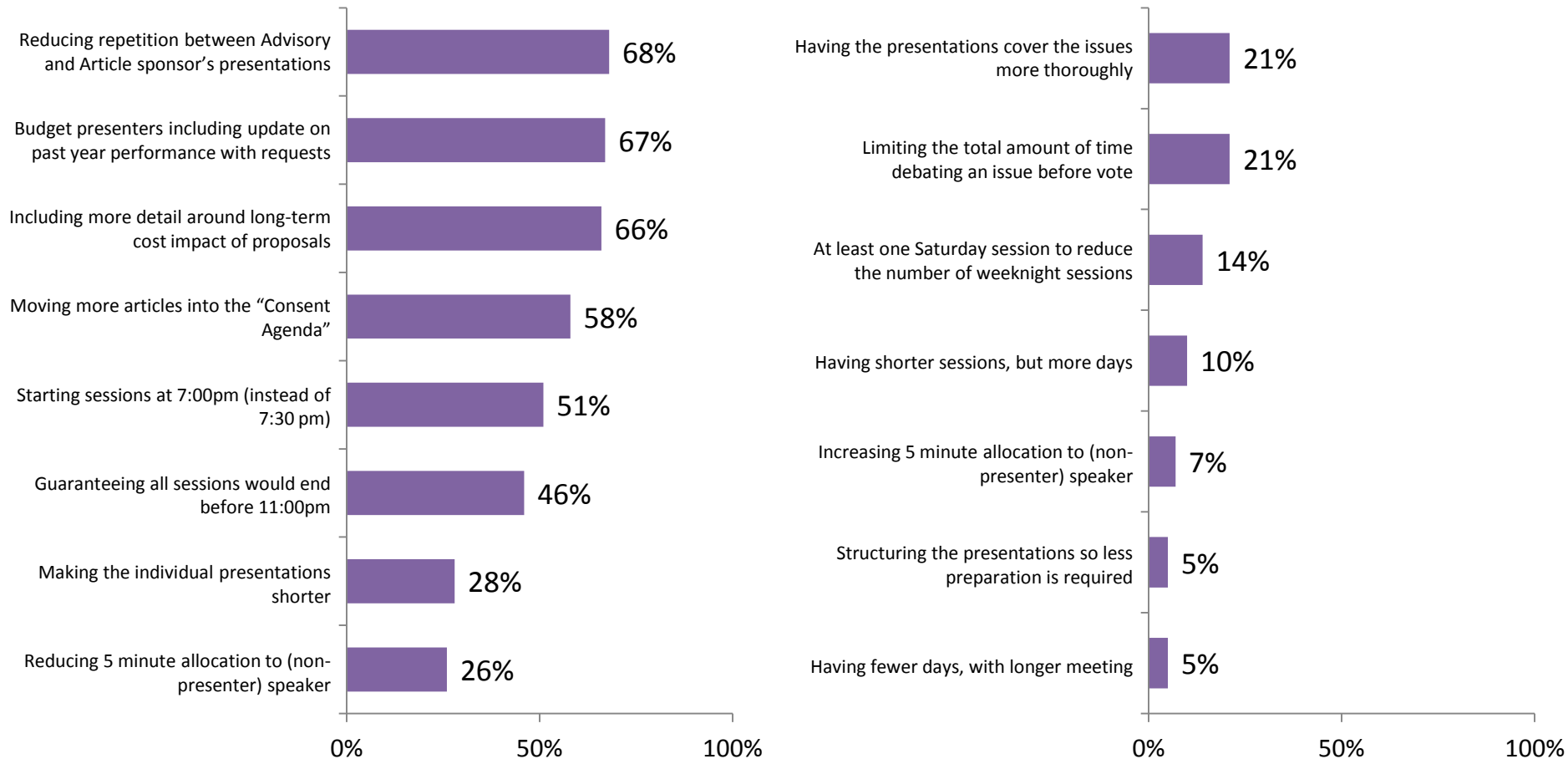
More substantive meetings (9)

- Advisory getting back to its earlier roots and being staff to TMM, providing them with details and discussion relevant to articles. Being less of a cheerleader for projects. Presentations being done by Board Chairs, not directors/staff though having them available to answer specific questions as needed. Presenting more details on the long range planning for the town, including the aggregate financial impact of these plans. Each spending motion is only considered on its own, seldom on what impact this has on the totals for upcoming years.
- I would like to have more conversations about where Wellesley is going and what it is trying to become. I would like to hear more about what municipalities are thinking about. I feel like we spend far too much time drilling down on details in the budget. But not enough time on the big picture. We should not be debating someone's 2% cola for as long as we do. There are significant important issues facing the town and the state. We should be thinking about those proactively rather than using all of our time debating details. That is where subcommittees could come in. Those that care about \$\$, those that care about issues on the horizon, etc.

Members being more prepared for meetings (3)

- Encourage all TMM to come to Town Meeting fully prepared, by completely reading the Advisory Report and attending the League's session and any other sessions offered to help prepare for TM.
- Moderator needs to be very strict about staying on topic, not repeating what has been said, and not allowing questions by folks who have clearly not read the material.

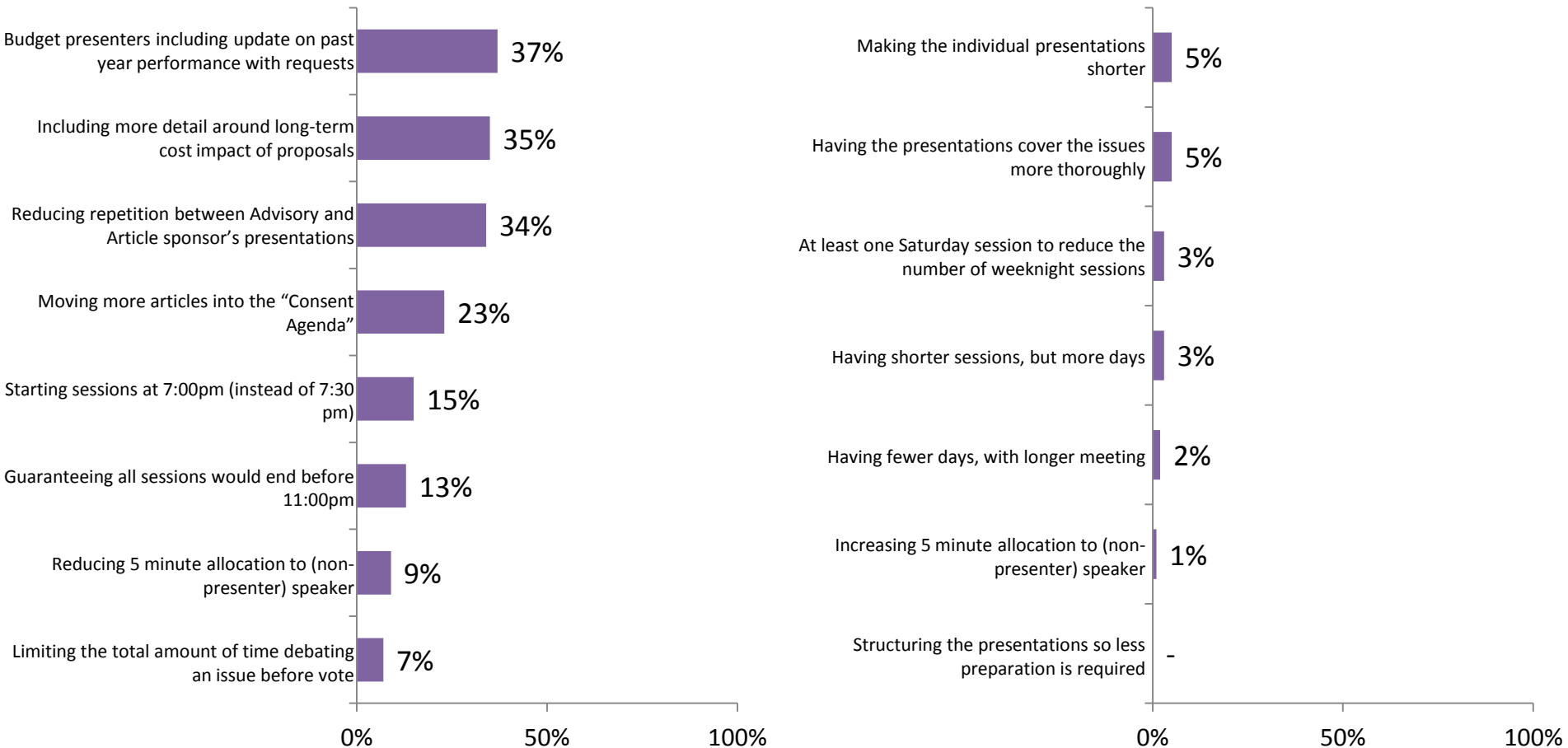
Ways to Make Town Meeting a Better Experience



(n=149)

22. Which of the following, if any, would make Town Meeting a better experience for you?

Top 2 Ways to Make Town Meeting a Better Experience



(n=149)

23. Which of the following, are the top 2 things that would make Town Meeting a better experience for you?

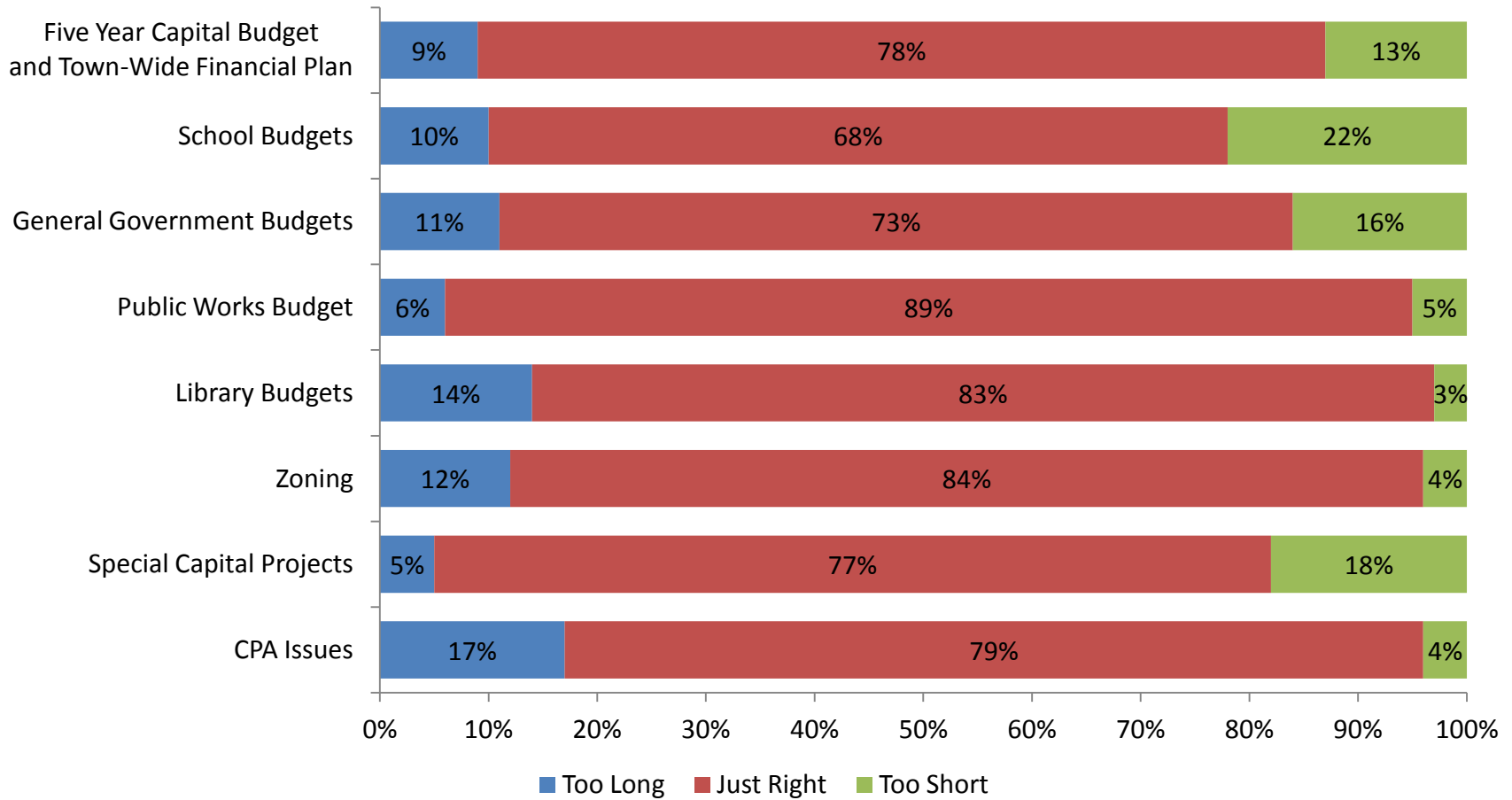
Support of Fall Town Meeting Scheduling Statements

	Very Supportive	Somewhat Supportive	Not at all Supportive
	%	%	%
Having predictable dates established for a Fall Town Meeting each year	63	27	10
Continuing the tradition of using a Fall Town Meeting only for critical needs that can not wait until Spring	59	27	14
Restricting the use of a Fall Town Meeting to specific types of issues (building projects, zoning bylaws, non-budget operating items, etc.)	45	32	23
Using a Fall Town Meeting to address issues that may not be time sensitive but would allow the Spring Town Meeting to be shorter (zoning, planning, other bylaws, etc.)	44	23	33
Using a Fall Town Meeting to address mid-year operating budget adjustment or supplements	21	35	44

(Base varies)

24. Currently, a Spring Town Meeting is mandated in the bylaws and Fall/Winter Town Meetings are called when necessary. Consideration is being given to having set dates reserved for a Fall Town Meeting each year so that potential dates are known well in advance. The tradition of using a Fall Meeting only when needed would continue. How supportive are you of:

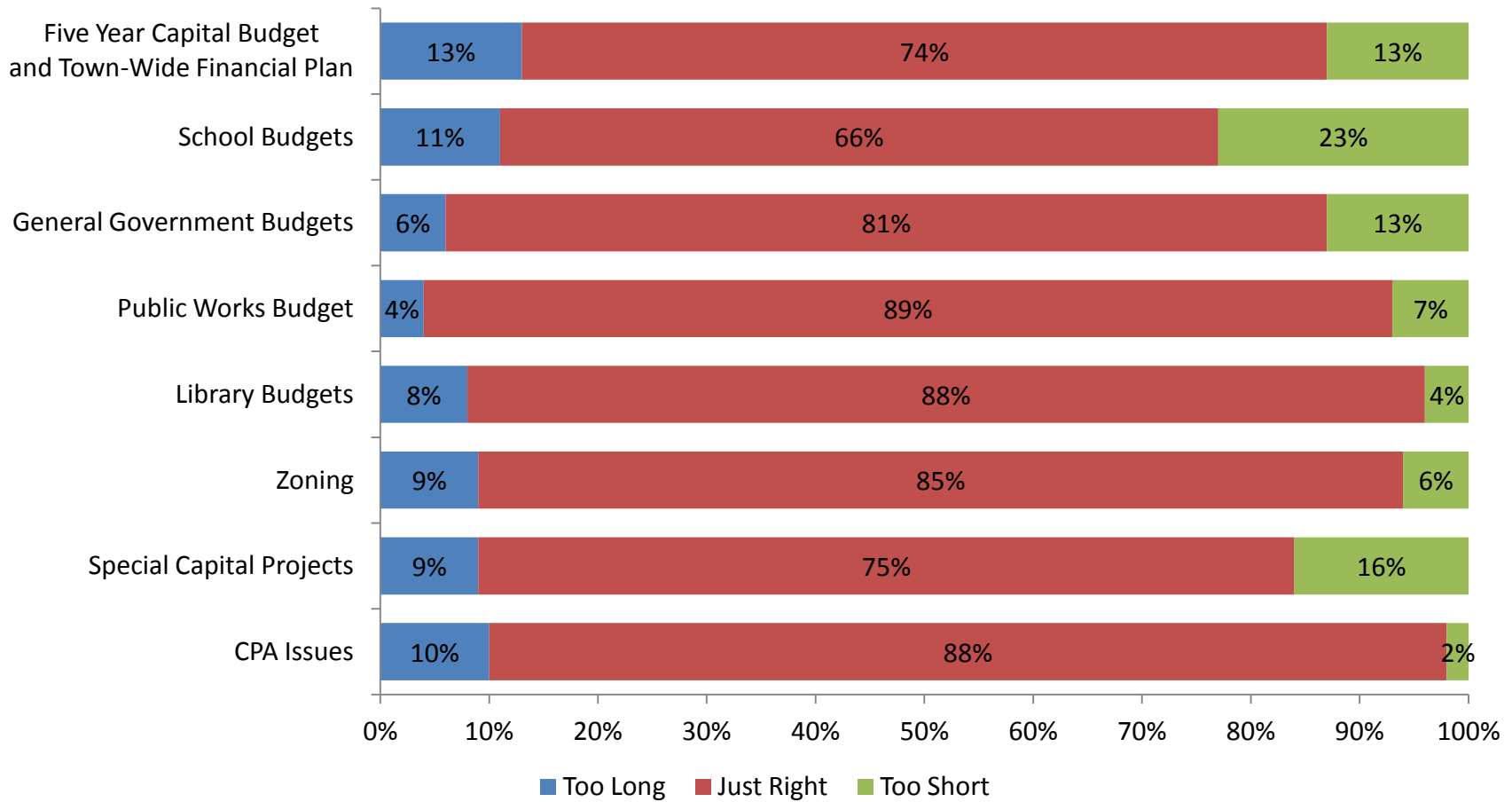
Feelings about Time Allotted in Spring 2015 Meeting to Presentations by Proponents



(Base varies)

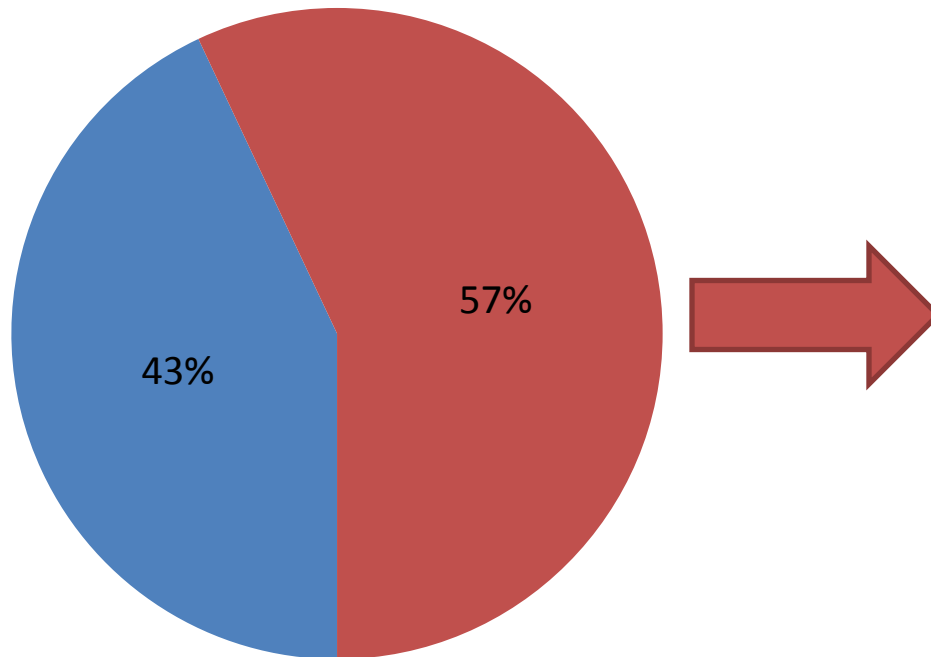
25. Please think specifically about the presentations by the proponents, not the whole discussion. How do you feel about the time allotted to the following presentations by the proponents at ATM?

Feelings about Time Allotted in Spring 2015 Meeting to Debate/Discussion



(Base varies)

Meeting Attendance



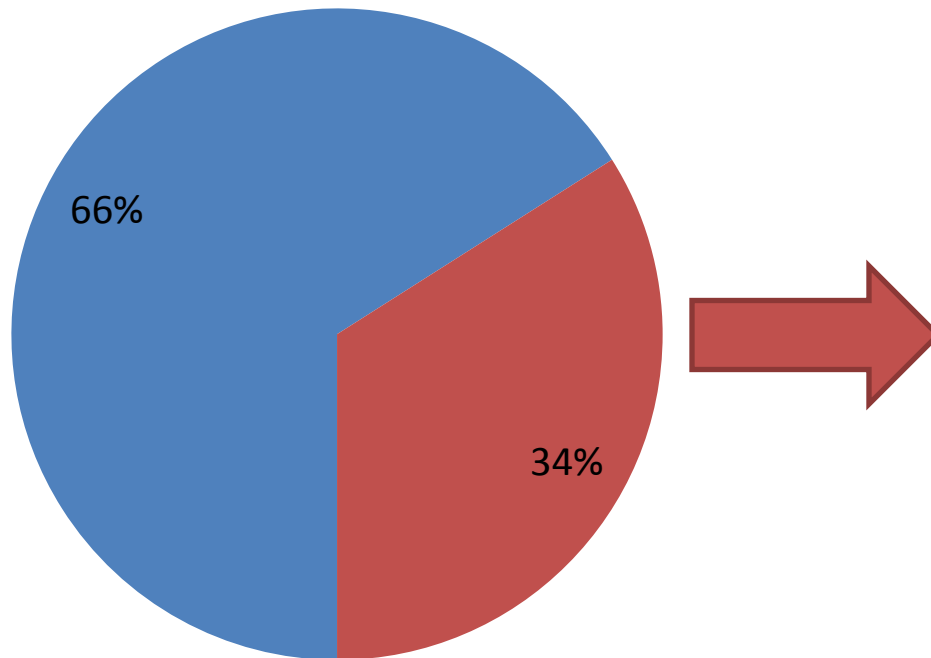
- Always able to attend all meetings
- Unable to attend all meetings

Reasons	
Conflict with previously scheduled commitments	51%
Illness	26%
Last minute change in plans/schedule	22%
On vacation	16%
Not interested in the articles being presented that night	-
Other	21%

(n=150)

27. Have you ever been unable to attend all ATM sessions (i.e., each of the evening meetings that were part of an ATM session)?
28. Why were you unable to attend all sessions? (**PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY**)

Leaving Meeting Early



■ No, have never left meeting before officially over

■ Yes, have left before meeting officially over

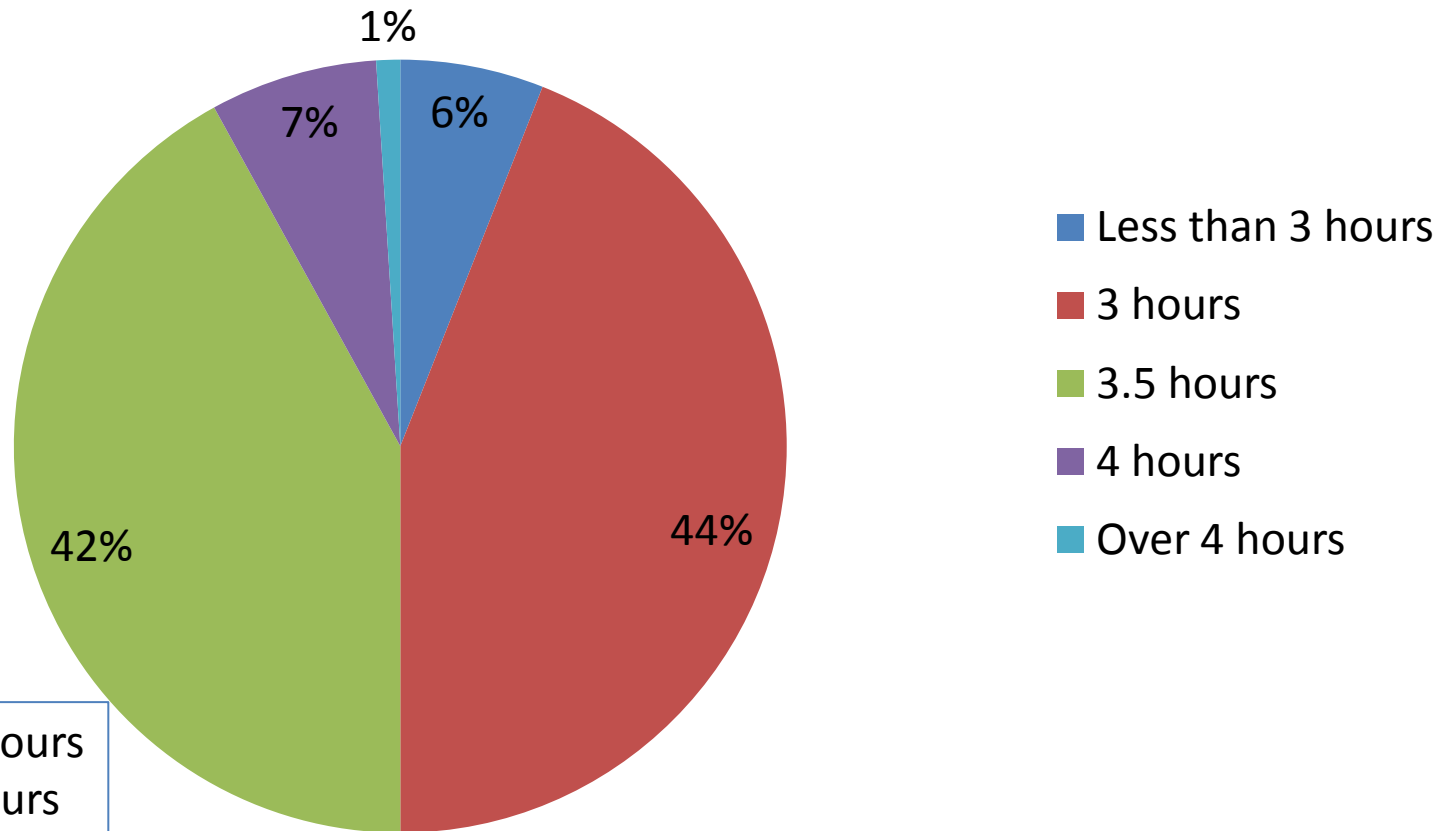
Reasons	
Session ran too late	43%
Conflict with previously scheduled commitments	35%
Not interested in the articles being covered later in the session	8%
Did not anticipate later votes	4%
Other	37%

(n=151)

29. Have you ever had to leave one of the evening meetings before it was officially over?

30. Why were you unable to stay for the full session on those evenings until adjournment? (PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

Ideal Length of Town Meeting Session



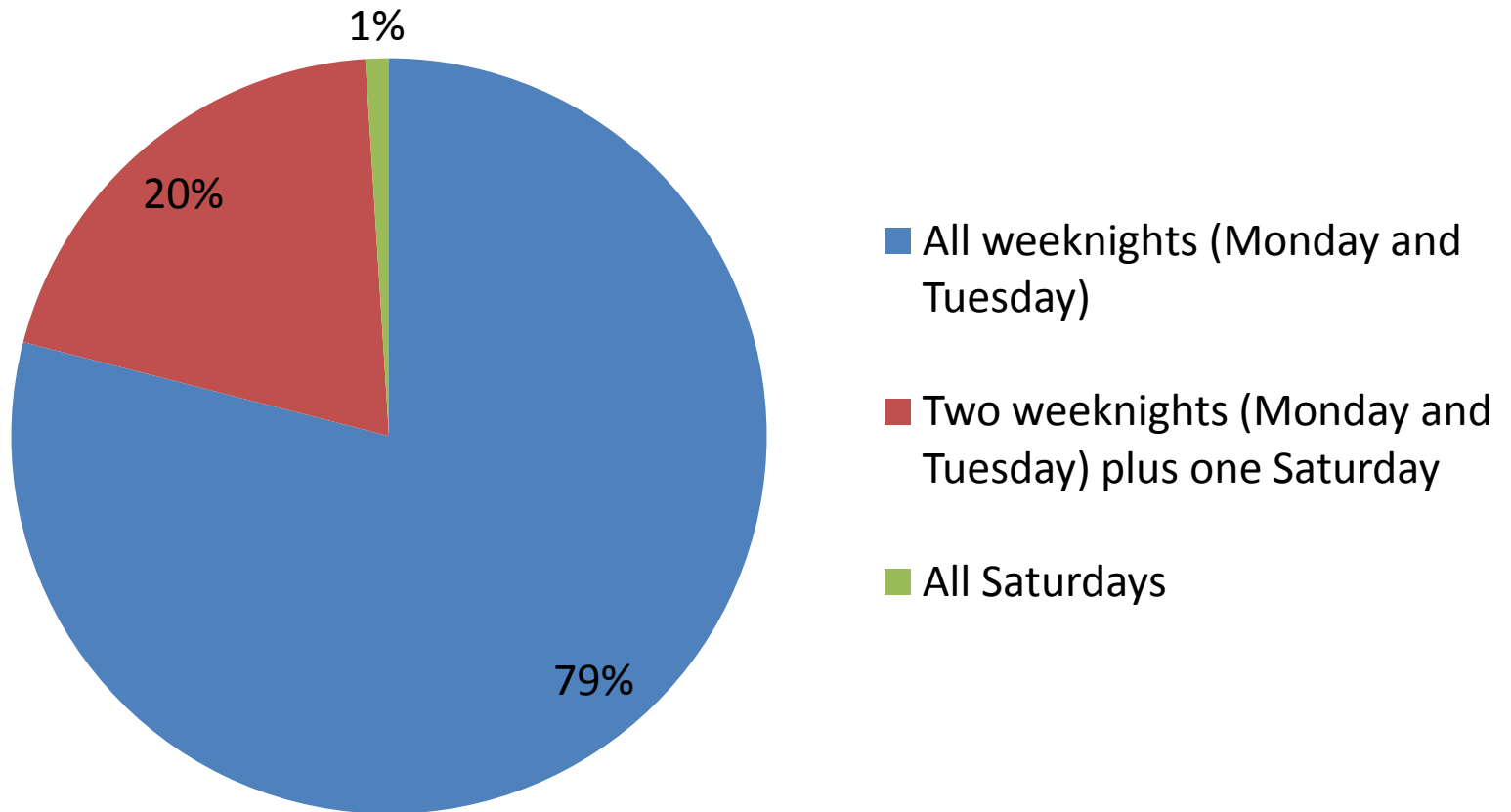
Acceptability of Changes to TM

	Very Acceptable	Somewhat Acceptable	Not Acceptable
	%	%	%
Going later into the evening to finish a particular article	36	37	27
Eliminating the break in order to conclude business earlier that evening	31	31	38
Shortening the length of time allotted to speakers and relying on members to fully read the report	29	34	37
Using a Saturday session to reduce the number of meetings required	13	14	73
Using a Saturday session to address a particular lengthy issue or set of issues	12	20	68

(Base varies)

32. How acceptable would each of the following be to you? **(SELECT ONE PER ROW)**

Combination of Days Preferred



(n=149)

33. Which combination of days would you prefer for Town Meeting? **(SELECT ONE)**

Earliest and Latest Start/End Times

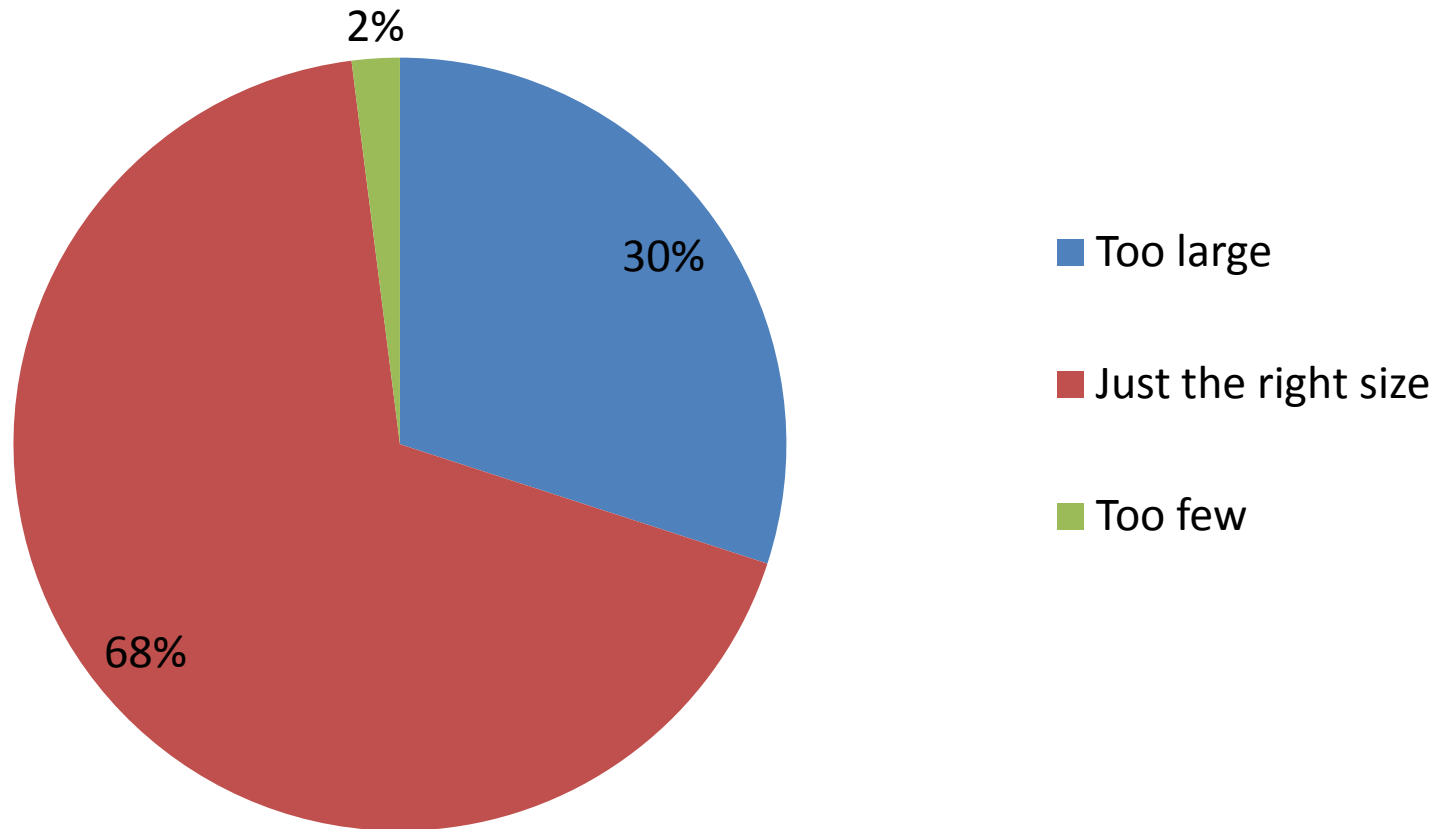
Earliest				Latest			
<u>Weekday</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Saturday</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Weekday</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Saturday</u>	<u>%</u>
Before 6:00pm	1	Before 9:00am	11	Before 10:00pm	2	Before 3:00pm	17
6:00pm	6	9:00am	27	10:00pm	5	3:00pm	9
6:30pm	15	9:30am	4	10:30pm	24	3:30pm	1
7:00pm	63	10:00am	6	11:00pm	51	4:00pm	7
7:30pm	15	10:30am	-	11:30pm	10	4:30pm	1
8:00pm	-	11:00am	1	12:00am (midnight)	7	5:00pm	10
After 8:00pm	-	11:30am	1	After 12:00am	1	After 5:00pm	1
		12:00pm	-			None Acceptable	54
		After 12:00pm	-				
		None Acceptable	50				

(Base varies)

34,35. What is the earliest start time that would be acceptable to you? **(SELECT ONE PER DAY TYPE)**

36,37. And, what is the latest end time that would be acceptable to you? **(SELECT ONE PER DAY TYPE)**

Feelings About Having 240 Members Representing Town



(n=148)

38. Do you feel that 240 members representing the Town is...? (SELECT ONE)